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This Isn't 1904

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There has been a rash of kidnappings of Americans in several parts of the world and for quite various forms of ransom. And the United States—wisely—has not had recourse to older, simpler, “poetic” forms of action.

It is not surprising that, here and there, this has produced feelings of frustration. The world's most powerful nation unable or unwilling to protect its own! Nor is it surprising that thoughts should turn back to “Teddy” Roosevelt's ultimatum (backed up by British and American warships) to the Sultan of Morocco: “Perdicaris alive or Raisuli dead.” It worked then—in 1904.

Senator Knowland's proposal—that the Cuban rebels surrender American hostages forthwith or that America wipe them out by way of giving arms to the totalitarian Batista regime—is one symptom of that frustration. So, too, is the request for congressional

“letters of marque” and the invitation to volunteers by Lyle H. Munson, former OSS and CIA agent, for launching expeditions to rescue American prisoners in five countries. The latter shows the old privateering spirit is not gone.

But the world of 1904 is. Then American and British power could deal with a North African potentate and his “official” bandit without the risk of setting a world on fire. Today the world seems one huge powder magazine. Peace-loving nations must and will do their best to rescue their nationals imprisoned in this or that corner of it. But they do not dash into just any situation like TV cowboys, firing their six-shooters in the air. Some things they might hit could blow up the whole “shebang” and not rescue anyone at that.

Any Americans thus frustrated will simply have to hold on to their emotions while remedies of 1958, not of 1904, are applied.